

WALL STREET JOURNAL

25 January 1985.

POLITICS AND POLICY

Kirkpatrick's Fate in the Reagan Administration May Be Decided Soon, Ending Spicy Melodrama

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WASHINGTON—Top-level White House advisers come and go, with one exception. For months now, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick has appeared to be doing both at the same time.

The breathless, highly publicized serial drama surrounding her fate is "a bit unusual," concedes Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was President Carter's special assistant for national security affairs. "Perhaps," he suggests archly, "in part curiosity has been engendered by the fact that she's participating in the speculation herself."

Not so, says Mrs. Kirkpatrick in an interview. "I am not the focus of any special controversy."

Yet while other recent high-level White House personnel changes have been both swift and surprising, her next assignment—if there is to be one—remains a diplomatic dither, the subject of bureaucratic infighting, spicy gossip, endless news-wire bulletins and feverish op-ed pieces.

The latest chapter of this melodrama suggests that President Reagan is ready to offer Mrs. Kirkpatrick the directorship of the Agency for International Development or possibly of the U.S. Information Agency at a meeting next Wednesday. Both posts have the advantage of not being physically located in the White House, where moderates like departing Chief of Staff James Baker are said to welcome her powerful presence about as much as a hunk of Limburger cheese. Adding suspense is the widespread belief that Mrs. Kirkpatrick considers neither post influential enough and probably would say no.

Meanwhile, in the eyes of foreign-policy hard-liners, her career has achieved symbolic status. With the foreign-policy establishment divided on such issues as Central American policy, she is "of watershed importance" as a counterweight against "the covey of White House pragmatists," says former National Security Adviser Richard Allen. Her leave-taking would create "a

loss from which Reagan's foreign policy will never recover," asserts right-wing fund-raiser Richard Viguerie. Conservative columnist William F. Buckley wants to "weave her into the flag as the '51st star.'"

'Master of the Tourniquet'

Until now, Mrs. Kirkpatrick has been what one admirer calls, "a master of the tourniquet." But it's possible that this time, she may have squeezed too hard. If so, it will end a drama that began more than a year ago, when she said that she planned to leave the U.N. post but was persuaded to stay on through the presidential election.

Then, last Nov. 19, she announced that she hoped to return to "the pleasures of private life" after the General Assembly ended. "I am absolutely not being coy about it," she said at the time. Yet privately, she let it be known that there were in fact a few offers she'd find it impossible to refuse: Namely, heading the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency or the National Security Council. Unfortunately for her, the president appeared content with the current occupants.

Her meeting with the president was scheduled for Nov. 20. But when Mr. Reagan granted a newspaper interview a day earlier saying he regretted having no job "worthy" of her, she postponed the meeting, citing "pressing business" at the U.N. She did in fact meet briefly with Mr. Reagan on Dec. 10, but apparently determined only to prolong any career decisions until after his inauguration. That meeting is finally to take place next Wednesday.

Ironically, while the hard-liners have been rallying to the cause of a woman famous for her sharp rhetoric, clear-headed intellect and uncompromising stands, Mrs. Kirkpatrick remains in the eye of the storm sounding ambivalent and even muddled about her political career, as all these public twists suggest.

Unattractive Side of Politics

"Although aspects of public life are enormously rewarding," says the 58-year-old former academic, who is still a member of the Democratic Party, "a lot of aspects of politics are extremely unattractive to me."

She has spent her life studying comparative politics, but says she was unprepared for "the meanness of the political infighting. I detest it. I surely was surprised to find the extent of it." She is known to feel that White House Chief of Staff Baker and presidential assistant Richard Darman

have it in for her. Although she wasn't specific in a recent interview, she said, "It seems clear to me that in the last year, I've developed two or three detractors."

She has spoken out against perceived sexual biases she has encountered, pointing out that words used to describe her, such as "schoolmarmish," "temperamental" and "difficult," have a sexist ring to them. (Her celebrated tangles with former Secretary of State Alexander Haig over such issues as the Falkland Islands crisis, and her remonstrances against such procedures as submitting her U.N. speeches to the State Department for prior approval, haven't quelled such talk).

Still, although she has never run for an elected office, her name has been mentioned by conservatives as one-half of a Republican "dream ticket" for 1988, along with New York Congressman Jack Kemp's. "She has a more powerful constituency behind her than anyone but President Reagan or George Bush," says Rep. Newt Gingrich (R., Ga.). "Arguably, she's the most powerful woman in America today," says David Gergen, former White House communications director.

Yet as either feminist or right-wing hero, she remains oddly ambivalent.

What does she want to do? She says she has her own version of President Truman's saying. "If you can't stand the heat," her version goes, "get back in the kitchen. I plan to do some serious cooking," she says (admitting that writing and lecturing may be in the cards, too).

She may be kidding, but at least one Washingtonian takes it as more than a joke. Her husband, political scientist Evron Kirkpatrick, says, "I'll be glad to have her back," adding: "When Jeane's here, the food's better."



Jeane Kirkpatrick